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RETHINKING URBAN LIFE:
ORDER AND DISORDER IN THE PUBLIC REALM

Claude S. Fischer

Cities . . . comprise a motley of peoples and cultures of highly differentiated modes of life between which there often is only the faintest communication, the greatest indifference, the broadest tolerance, occasionally bitter strife, but always the sharpest contrast.

Louis Wirth, 1938

The panel that the Association has brought together for this session presents, for me, a happy coincidence. As this paper will show, my ideas along the line of "rethinking urban life" are indebted to the work of Lofland, Suttles, Castells, and Sennett. Their research and writing on the urban public sphere have helped draw me away from exclusive concentration on its private sphere.

I will make three speculative arguments in this paper. One, traditional explanations, both academic and popular, of urban life's distinctive qualities, particularly of its disorderliness, focus on moral

dissensus. And they assume that the degree of moral order in urban public life is closely tied to the degree of moral order in urbanites' private lives. That assumption of intimate connection between public and private realms of urban life is empirically wrong and misleads urban studies. Two, it is nevertheless true that public life in cities is more disorderly than public life in rural places and that fundamental properties of urbanism cause this difference in disorderliness. Three, despite these tendencies, urban public life is more often orderly than not because several "solutions" to the problem of sustaining order without moral consensus have evolved in cities.

Before proceeding to these arguments, I should define some key and controversial terms. By order and disorder, I mean, most generally, the extent to which social behavior proceeds predictably and according to conventional expectations.¹ This definition raises, of course, the question of "whose norms?" What is disorderly to some is quite ordered to others — for example, juveniles' late-night cruising of city streets. Typically, however, the concrete incidences of disorder are clearly so to most residents, incidences such as fights, drunkenness, exhibitionism, offenses to "good taste," group conflict and violence. The idea of order often connotes tranquility (for instance, one dictionary defines order as a "regular or harmonious arrangement") and, although that need not be logically so — North African blood feuds were quite subtly ordered -- in public perception tranquility generally accompanies order.

1. Thus, the O.E.D. defines "public order" as "the condition in which laws and usages regulating the public relations of individuals . . . are maintained and observed."

"Moral" means "of or relating to principles of right or wrong in behavior." "Moral order" is an order founded on consensus about such principles, or more broadly, on a shared cultural interpretation of the social world. By "private life" I mean individuals' relatively personal, familiar, and shielded social milieux, such as home, immediate neighborhood, work setting, and club. By "public life" I mean relatively open and universal social contexts, such as through streets, stores, newspapers, and civic offices, as well as the general platform of community affairs.² I trust that these perhaps pedantic sentences will help avoid confusion later on.

I. Conceptions of Public and Private Moral Orders

Stroll the streets of this city for a short while and you will quickly recall the line of thought that stimulated the classical sociologies of urban life: Why doesn't this incredible melange of human types fall apart into a Hobbesian chaos? Well, perhaps it has fallen apart. Or, at least, our local Sodom-and-Gomorra^h seems to always teeter on the brink of fire and brimstone.

The classical approach was to analyze the urban condition in terms of moral consensus -- the need for it, its weakness in the city, and the disorder its weakness brought forth. That is apparent in the work of the European patriarchs of urban sociology, such as Tonnies, Simmel, and

2. From the O.E.D.: private is "not open to the public"; "of, pertaining or relating to, or affecting a person, or a small intimate body or group of persons apart from the general community; individual; personal." And public "is open to . . . all members of the community; not restricted to the private use of any person or persons."

Durkheim. It is apparent, too, in the American intellectual tradition that co-parented urban studies. The Puritans' idealized "city upon a hill" was founded upon the notion of perfect concord among a community of "saints" (see Rutman, 1965; Zuckerman, 1970; Smith, 1968). The urban reformers of the nineteenth century tried to recreate in the teeming cities the shared Christian humility and social control they recalled from their own small-town childhoods (see Boyer, 1978). And today, conservative critics of American urban life chide citizens for their "uncivil" reluctance to subordinate parochial interests to overarching civic ends.³

Yet, time and again, the apparent lack of urban moral order crushes such aspirations. Public urban life repeatedly seems in disarray. It did not take long for the Puritan towns to fall from grace into bickering and splintering, and for Winthrop's Boston to become divided into factions, as well as beset by sinfulness (Rutman, 1965; Nash, 1979).

3. See, for example, Arkes (1981), who critiques pluralistic praises of urban life:

What is lost, then, in this vision of the city as a shopping center is the sense of a people joined together in a perception of common ends; who found their common life on procedures they regard, by and large, as just; and who cultivate an understanding of justice and morals in one another through the things they hold up to the community with the force of law. What is lost, in a word, is the sense of the city as polity. [p. 3]

The polis is, preeminently, a moral association. [Italics added.] Its distinctive end is to cultivate a sense of morals or justice in its members. . . [p. 10]

Whose morals and laws and common ends, and how we decide which of the parochial many are elevated to those of the universal polis, is a question largely begged by culture critics such as Arkes. Somehow, the ideals usually turn out to be the morals, laws, and ends of the established academe.

Misbehavior of minor sorts, such as public drunkenness, declined during the nineteenth century (Monkkonen, 1981), perhaps in some small part thanks to the shelters and reforms of the Christian crusaders, but major clashes involving racial, labor, and political factions have marked American cities all along. And today, the stroll in San Francisco and a casual perusal of urban newspapers should make apparent what sociological studies detail -- that American cities are considerably more conflict-ridden and publicly disordered than its small communities.

Disorder is not unique to American cities, although it is probably exceptionally high there among the cities of the western world. Disorder is a general concomitant of city life. For example, a 1976 French survey found that the larger the community, the more commonly residents reported experiencing public hostilities (Lech and Labrousse, 1977). I will return to this empirical claim in the next section.

Robert Ezra Park, Louis Wirth, and the rest of the Chicago School saw this rampant disorder in the striking example of Chicago. The theoretical interpretation of urban disorder that they articulated -- and which all subsequent urbanists have had somehow to confront -- systematized the moral consensus explanation: Cities were disorderly because the "natural" moral consensus of communities disintegrated under the onslaught of population concentration and heterogeneity.

The basic processes by which urbanization presumably generates disorder are two, according to the theoretical framework Park and Wirth constructed from the classical heritage: One, the nervous stimulation produced by the hyperactive urban environment causes people to protectively withdraw from and narrow their public social involvements. This

alienation, initially from secondary ties, becomes a personality style which also estranges people from their private relations, thus weakening primary groups. Two, the structural differentiation arising from urbanization creates new institutions which usurp the functions of primary and primordial ones such as family, neighborhood, and church; which entice people away from those basic groups; and which help individualize people -- all of which undermines the social control of primary institutions, releasing individuals' egoistic drives, and making difficult any community-wide mechanical solidarity, any moral consensus. (For a fuller explication, see Fischer, 1972; 1983.)

Quite importantly and perhaps unfortunately for future urban theories, the processes by which urbanism presumably weakens moral order depends on a strong causal link between public and private life. Qualities of the urban environment -- its variety, complexity, differentiation -- strain and sunder the social bonds of private life. Urbanism weakens and isolates the family, thins out the substance of friendships, devalues and desacralizes the church, distracts neighbors from one another, and generally leaves urban people free but lonely individuals. This condition of anomie in private life then "releases" individual impulses toward disorderly behavior, to deviance, crime, rebelliousness, mob action, and so on. (This model is, of course, consistent with what Charles Tilly has labelled the "breakdown" theory of collective action: that the collapse of social control releases impulses to act out against authority.)

This has been and still is a persuasive line of analysis. It is consistent with sociology's most common answer to the Hobbesian problem,

that order is sustained by shared values and therefore disorder reflects a failure to instill and enforce those values. It is also consistent with folk interpretations of public behavior which tend, at least in America, to stress individual character and will as the prime movers of social action. (In the next section, I will note more specifically how urban disorder gets systematically explained in terms of individual willfulness.)

Much research, including my own, has followed this theoretical map. And the upshot seems almost certainly to be that the theory is, at least in broad strokes, incorrect: Urbanism does not destroy private life, vitiate intimate relations, isolate individuals, or derange them so that they become disorderly.⁴ The moral orders of Park's "little worlds that touch but do not interpenetrate" seem well preserved in the great metropolis.

A major problem with the Chicago School analysis is the assumption I have underlined, that the public and private spheres affect one another so strongly. Instead, research suggests that the border between the two may be almost impermeable. Strong solidarities, intimate relations, and passionate moral codes persist in small milieux in the midst of cities marked by multiple factions, public impersonality touching on rudeness, and a moral cacophony sounding much like rampant amorality. Generations of urban ethnographers, starting with the Chicago School itself, described what Herbert Gans typified as "urban villagers." And

4. This is a major claim, but well substantiated. See, for example, my review of the literature (Fischer, 1983) and my own recent study (Fischer, 1982).

other studies suggest that city dwellers need not be ethnic nor exotic to live in meaningful personal worlds.

Now, some who have recognized this division of public and private spheres claim that it has only emerged in the modern era; that the construction of private worlds and the retreat into them is a type of anomie, even if it is a retreat that the nuclear family makes together. But I think not. A clear line between private life among "us" and public interaction with "them" seems to be a historical constant in city life. Descriptions of ancient cities suggest that major distinctions were made between behavior within the walled ethnic quarters or on guild streets versus that with "foreigners" elsewhere in the city (see, for example, Lapidus, 1966, 1980). And anthropologists describing contemporary third-world cities note the distinctions made, even in diction, between interaction with fellow ethnics and with outsiders (see, for example, Bruner, 1973a; 1973b; Berreman, 1978; Provencher, 1972).

Somewhat more accurate is the claim that the public/private distinction emerges only in cities of whatever historical era. There is no separate private realm in small communities. According to this view, the entire community is coterminous with the private sphere because all its residents are familiar to one another. My impression, however, is that the public/private distinction is present in small communities (at least in those larger than a hunting band) -- and may even be an acutely sensitive issue. I am thinking of ethnographies of peasant life in which the actors are anxiously concerned that their personal affairs not become public and are also shrewdly aware of how their personal interests may conflict with those of their neighbors.⁵

5. There is, for example, Laurence Wylie's (1964) Village in the Vaucluse, where people warned the researcher about one another; George

The key way urbanism affects the dichotomy between public and private is in the width of the gap it opens up. The public world in small communities tends to be peopled by familiar others -- by acquaintances, friends of friends, or at least by individuals who seem familiar and similar, who look and and act like oneself. They are still separate from the closer intimates and so the public/private distinction exists. But, unlike in cities, the public others are recognizable and seemingly compatible. The public world in large cities tends to be, in Lyn Lofland's phrase, a "world of strangers" -- peopled by those one does not know, does not even recognize, and who are distinctly different from oneself.

And yet, private life -- with kin, coworkers, friends, and so on -- seems to thrive quite well even in the midst of such a strange, often foreboding, public life. The two realms of action are, of course, not totally separate. The character of a resident population, including the nature of its private life (e.g., rates of marriage, value systems) will affect a city's public life. And the community environment does influence personal relations (a point I try to make in To Dwell Among Friends). But, the conclusion to be stressed here is the independence of the two realms, in particular, the persistence of private moral orders within disorderly and morally diverse public communities.

Foster's (1960; 1967) Mexican peasants guarding against one another in accord with the "theory of limited good;" and Edward Banfield's (1958) Italian villagers practicing "amoral familism." Also, students of small-town social networks, such as Patricia Crowe (1978) in the Tyrol, often hear people say that they distance themselves from others because of the danger of private information becoming public or of outsiders interfering in private affairs.

Given this argument, I am led to say that urban sociologists ought to focus on the dynamics of that public order directly, shucking the old assumption that the public must be reflecting the private, and instead analyzing urban order and disorder in its own terms. (This call is much like that made recently by Lyn Lofland [1982] to cease viewing secondary, public relations through a theoretical prism designed to examine primary relations.) It is to that task that I turn next.

II. Urbanism Generates Public Disorder

In this section, I will argue that cities (qua cities) make public life problematic and chronically disordered. I will distinguish two public arenas, the "micro" arena of individual, face-to-face, interaction and the "macro" arena of group interaction.

Problems of the Micro-Order. Urban life, more so than small-town and rural life, places the individual in problematic public settings, ones in which shared understandings are weak, expectations unclear, and the social process can easily -- often does -- collapse. The management of such public encounters has been examined by several scholars, including Erving Goffman, Stanley Milgram, Lyn Lofland, and Robert Edgerton.

The distinguishing condition of public encounters in urban communities -- in bus stations, ticket lines, sports stadia, department stores, government offices, museums, subway cars, and so on -- is that they typically involve strangers. We must deal, at least tacitly, with people whom we do not know personally, whom we do not recognize, and most important, who are quite obviously different from us in many important

social features — class, ethnicity, age, lifestyle, and so on. In small towns, more of the people, more of the time, are what I termed familiars.

In such situations, behavioral expectations are not shared and not certain. How far apart to sit or stand, whether to say something or not, whether even to make eye contact -- these elementary stylistic norms vary from group to group and carry different implications for each.⁶ Then, should any noteworthy event occur, there are quite different interpretations of it and of appropriate action. Is a staggering person drunk, ill, or crazy? Do you approach him or not? If a man and woman start screaming, is it an everyday dispute or a potentially fatal assault? Would intervention be possible, welcome, or resented? If some teen-agers are boisterously using four-letter words, is that delinquency or simple high spirits? Will an adult reprimand be taken respectfully or with hostility? In situations such as these, which in urban life involve unknown and quite "foreign" others, we do not know what is going on and what ought to be done. There is only a thin layer of shared meaning and morality, if any at all. (For further discussion, see Fischer, 1982: Ch. 18.)

This fragile order often collapses -- crises occur to which no one responds, or fights actually break out. And of course, serious criminal acts occur -- at higher rates in cities than in small towns (Fischer, 1983: Ch. 4). Even when order is maintained, people are anxious about

6. For example, research has shown that blacks and whites tend to have different unconscious norms about where one should look when talking or listening to another person (e.g., LaFrance and Mayo, 1976).

its fragility. They may adopt specific protective styles of action, distancing ones that have come to be seen as uniquely "urban," and that further amplify the ambiguity of the situation.

The processes I have described are consistent with the Chicago School's ideas about moral order: The weaker value consensus in the city makes interaction more problematic than in the small town. But these processes have little to do with the quality of private moral orders, with the integrity of the family or the continuity of an ethnic cultural tradition.

(Such public encounters and small-scale disorders contribute to the confusion of public and private in two ways: One, people assume that unusual, odd, or disorderly behavior is a manifestation of private pathology, when it is often simply different behavior than that valued by the observer. Two, they commonly assume that the reserved styles of those present reflect their constricted and cold personalities. The research on "deviance" and on bystander behavior suggests that both assumptions are dubious as general rules, though they might be right in specific cases. What is seen as deviant by many is often quite normative within the social world of the actor. And public reserve is a special style of action used by many people who are, within their own social worlds, quite feeling.)

In sum, because urbanism means larger populations and larger scale, it usually means more experiences in public settings among strangers and more incidences of actual or anticipated disorder.

Problems of the Macro-Order. Although the fragile nature of these small-scale social settings gives urban life much of its unique flavor, the more substantial problems of order arise from community-wide, structural processes. It is almost inherent to cities -- indeed, some insert it into the definition of "city" -- that they are heterogeneous. They are composed of varying races, nationalities, religions, occupations, life-stage cohorts, and cultural groups, each with its own system of meanings and values, each with its own parochial interests. Moreover, it is likely that the urban milieu itself generates new subgroupings, energizes others, and accentuates many of the distinctions among them (as I have argued elsewhere -- Fischer, 1975; 1982; 1983). City life is, in Park's eternal phrase, a "mosaic of little worlds" Or, in Louis Wirth's words, "Cities . . . comprise a motley of peoples and cultures of highly differentiated modes of life between which there often is only the faintest communication, the greatest indifference, the broadest tolerance, occasionally bitter strife, but always the sharpest contrast" (1938: 160).

More concretely, the cultural heterogeneity of the city leads to suspicion, tension, and conflict over ends, means to ends, and even styles in applying the means. Certainly, conflict arises in small communities; they can be quite bitter, in part because they involve acquaintances (Konig, 1968). Small towns are certainly not the happy harmonies of "Our Town" nostalgia. But urban conflict is of a different magnitude: It tends to be more pervasive, extensive, and serious. While a small town may be divided over a major issue -- today, that is likely to be growth -- a city will tend to be split over many issues more of the time. Also, urban conflict tends to occur across many cleavages.

While a small town is often split by race or by class, a city will tend to divide by race, class, labor versus business, young versus old, lifestyle and values, and so on, all at the same time and almost all the time. And urban conflict will often revolve precisely around the legitimacy and power of the subcultures. While a town battle may rage over real estate interests or school books, a city will tend to divide over issues such as affirmative action for blacks in government, the legitimacy of "gay" rights, whether class succession should be permitted in gentrified neighborhoods, and so on. The cultural heterogeneity of the city itself is a source of conflict.⁷

The very complexity of the urban infrastructure generates chronic problems around "collective goods." Manuel Castells has shown how "contradictions" in urban systems -- say, the location of jobs in a center city without the mass transit to bring people to those jobs -- generates group struggles. Such struggles become an ongoing part of the city's evolution, an almost necessary part of the system's ability to adapt.

7. The evidence that conflict is greater in cities is varied and persuasive. For example, most comparative studies show greater electoral divisions in cities than in small towns (see, e.g., Dahl and Tufte, 1973; Prewitt and Eulau, 1969; Black, 1974), with greater class polarization (e.g., Ennis, 1962; Hamilton, 1972: Ch. 6); higher per-worker strike rates (e.g., Lincoln, 1978; Bennett and Earle, 1982; Logan, 1978); and higher rates of ethnic tension and violence (e.g., Morgan and Clark, 1973; Spilerman, 1971; and the vast literature on tribal conflict in African cities). It seems also that urbanites are, in spite of their more liberal ideologies, more likely to complain about other cultural groups' behavior than are small town people, precisely because negative encounters are more common (Fischer, 1982: Ch. 18). The specific dimensions that I argue distinguish urban conflicts from those of small towns emerged from a systematic reading I did for several months of about a half-dozen northern California newspapers, ranging from the San Francisco Examiner to small city newspapers covering rural areas (ibid., p. 240). For more on these issues, see Fischer (1983: Chs. 5, 6, and 8).

Moreover, as conflicts emerge, they tend more often in cities than small places to become exacerbated by certain features of the urban setting. The concrete interests at stake are more often sizeable and correlated with cultural boundaries. A classic case is New York City, where battles over school budgets and control involve millions of dollars and overlap with black-Jewish tensions. And the cultural contrasts impede solutions: the parties are often socially estranged -- living apart and even physically distinct; they often do not share a common language or a common interpretation of the lingua franca; they do not share a common moral understanding.

For all these reasons, cities generate public conflicts among groups and tension over latent conflicts to a greater degree than do small towns.

(As in the case of the micro-order, these problems of the larger moral order have also been misanalyzed by confusing the public dynamics with private life. Social conflict, the "incivility" of certain groups, urban violence, and the like have typically been interpreted in terms of a "breakdown" in the social control of individuals that "releases" their anti-social impulses. Although perhaps true in specific cases, research suggests that urban conflict can be better understood as the product of realistic conflicts of interest acted upon by organized -- not alienated -- members of city subgroups.)

At these two levels, the "micro" processes of face-to-face public experiences and the "macro" processes of group interaction, urban life

involves a precarious public order. This, I would argue, tends to be typical of most cities in most historical periods (in contrast to their hinterlands) -- although to varying degrees, as I will discuss below. We should not pass on, however, without at least highlighting a distinct third threat to the contemporary American urban order: personal crime. Crimes of certain sorts -- theft and vice -- have generally been an accompaniment to cities. But in a few eras, very threatening personal crime has also typified the city. Americans are living in such an era, one in which homicide rates are higher in cities than in the countryside, an historically atypical situation. Nevertheless, in such circumstances, the sensation of danger further erodes any remaining sense of a public moral order.⁸

III. Solutions to Urban Disorder

Given these forces of disorder, why doesn't everything fall apart? One answer is: Sometimes it does fall apart. Sometimes, in public settings, order collapses, people fight, or panic, or riot, or crimes occur, or people fail to act collectively, or the social process somehow falters. And sometimes, the larger order of the community falls apart into a race riot, or class war, or political stalemate of some kind. Particularly acute examples are Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Beirut over the last several years, where the most basic assumptions of public life have been undermined by virtually all-out group warfare.

8. Urban crime is, of course, a vast topic. These claims are defended in Fischer (1983: Chs. 4 and 8).

More often, however, things do not fall apart; they just limp along. Indeed, it can be amazing to realize the extent that order is maintained in circumstances that one might well expect (especially if one read the ethological literature on crowding and pathology) to result in bedlam. Robert Edgerton (1979) has described how 450,000 almost naked people -- more than the population of Atlanta, Georgia -- can crowd a small stretch of Southern California beach and yet create relatively few problems. Every working day, people of various shades and backgrounds are jammed cheek-to-cheek and elbow-to-rib in the New York subway; yet the social process continues and rarely becomes chaotic. Cities as dense, diverse, and complex as London, Tokyo, and even New York, maintain sufficient order to provide a range of shared services, a stable environment for normal routines, and the like. How?

What follows is a preliminary and crude effort to identify some of the processes that seem to sustain public order in the absence of moral consensus. Where these "solutions" are pursued more successfully, order is more secure. Whether that order ought to be sustained and whether these solutions ought to be encouraged are entirely different issues. I will be describing, not recommending.

Sustaining Order at the Personal Level. An important solution to the threat of public disorder in small interpersonal arenas is simply avoidance. It is probably more an American than European solution. Through spatial segregation of homes and facilities, we can generally avoid encountering on the street or in post offices, stores, schools, and so on, types of people with whom we lack a common moral universe, thereby avoiding potential disorder, or at least, anxiety about

disorder.

John Schneider (1980) has shown, in the case of Detroit in the mid-1800s, how evolving spatial segregation helped ease middle-class worries about public disorder. A recent study suggests that racial segregation eases fear of crime, even holding constant actual risk of crime (Liska et al., 1982). One way, then, for individuals to avoid threats to public order from cross-cultural encounters is to avoid such encounters.

A related tactic is wariness. That is, a constant on-guard attitude in public places can help anticipate and forestall dangerous encounters. We get a sense of this as an urban strategy from caricatures of the country "hick" and the city "slicker." The former is repeatedly "taken," because he lacks the ready suspiciousness of the latter. In my terms, the hick presumes a moral commonality the latter knows is absent.

Stereotyping seems also to be a useful strategy, especially in countries without western ideologies of "brotherhood." Where city dwellers share common stereotypes about one another -- as has been described by anthropologists reporting from Africa and Asia (e.g., Bruner, 1973a; 1973b) -- there are at least some minimal guides to behavior in mixed settings.⁹

9. Closer to home, Sally Merry (1981) has described quite vividly a setting of virtual moral anarchy in which all three of these tactics are used as measures of self-defense. It is a crime-ridden public housing project with heavy proportions of blacks, Chinese, and whites. Order, such as it is, is sustained by mutual suspicion, negative stereotypes, and resultant avoidance.

A quite different but no doubt historically common solution is simply coercion. Where a centrally controlled police apparatus is omnipresent and stern, it can enforce the cultural understandings of the ruling group. Of course, at least the latent use of coercion is probably present in most urban settings. But some cities and some settings rely more and more successfully on coercion for the maintenance of order than do others.

Scholars writing on public interaction -- Lofland, Goffman, Milgram, and so on -- have explored yet another kind of solution: a public etiquette. In the modern American context, one thinks of proper manners (such as "selective inattention"), nonverbal cues of recognition, careful physical spacing, and what we might call "elevator behavior" that lubricates what might otherwise be a frictional social process. In other contexts, the public etiquette is more complex. For example, medieval rules of dress and deference guided interaction across class and national lines a few centuries back. Or, one can think of the complex caste rules of India or of the Old South as, in part, etiquettes for guiding public interaction.

Rules of public etiquette exist in most places, but they are, I suggest, most developed in the most urban places. Again, anecdotes about naive country folk reflect this difference, as does the comment of a San Franciscan interviewed by David Hummon (1980):

I'm a city person. I've had exposure to life, I feel comfortable in the city, I can get around. I know how to deal with people on a very informal basis. There are certain rules: how to get along in a city, what to expect from people you don't

know. In a small town, I think there is much more of a personal level of what's expected. While in the city, you don't have the opportunity to get to know people that well. I think a lot of small town people -- that really throws them for a loop. They can't understand how everybody's just getting along.

Note that this public etiquette is just that: a public style of behavior, and not what it is often mistaken to be: a reflection of personality. People use this style in the appropriate settings, while being very personable in private (see, again, Lofland, 1973).

I have excluded from this list of "solutions" any recourse to moral consensus -- although one might think of the public etiquette as involving a form of minimal, "rules of the game," sort of moral consensus. Yet, there may be some modicum of symbols or values that is shared and which also helps to sustain the public order. What comes to mind here is one of the few civic icons that unites an urban population, the sports team. The way the people of San Francisco were united and overjoyed about the success of the 49ers last year was truly remarkable -- an outbreak of "collective effervescence" matched only by that over military victories. (I am thinking here, not of the celebratory riot that broke out around town, but of the commonality the team's success created among strangers -- smiles, conversation, exchanges of victory signs, and so on.) Sports provides citizens of almost every kind and stripe with a shared subject and a shared perspective on that subject -- e.g., how the Giants did last night and that it is good for them to win -- without any overtones of potential conflict. (Crime, for example, is another shared

topic, and everyone is against it, but it quickly leads to issues of politics, race, class, and values.) Still, this residue of consensus highlights all the more the problem of sustaining urban order without consensus.

Sustaining Order at the Community Level. The processes just discussed can help avoid or control conflict and tension among individuals. There is, more critically, the problem of controlling conflict between organized social groups. Here, too, I would like to suggest a speculative list of ways urban warfare is avoided.

One general strategy is to preserve as much homogeneity as possible. My impression is that the best-running and most orderly western metropolises are relatively homogenous in nationality and in social class, such as the Scandinavian cities, or Tokyo. And there are certainly historical examples of cities with rigid entry controls, such as "orthodox" cities (Redfield and Singer, 1954), that allowed the internal life to be more orderly.

The tactic of avoidance discussed earlier applies as well to sustaining the macro-order. American residential segregation often coincides with municipal lines, which allows the small polities surrounding center cities to enjoy relative consensus over community issues. Suburban governments can continue as quiet caretaking operations even while the city across the line is rent by political battles (see, e.g., Prewitt and Eulau, 1969; Wood, 1958). More explicit versions of local autonomy can be found historically in the medieval cities with self-governing quarters.

Simple dominance by one group over others in the city also helps preserve order. This solution appears to be common in many African cities where a particular tribe dominates the power structure and imposes a clear hierarchy in the spoils system. Such an order can, of course, break down if a subordinate group grows in sufficient numbers and power to challenge the existing hierarchy. In more democratic society, a large and homogeneous majority can provide the same sort of stability, particularly if it remains united on a variety of topics. Where minorities grow -- say, with the burgeoning black populations of American cities -- or where the majority splits on other topics -- say, property-owners versus renters -- that order is threatened.

What is probably most common in the American urban scene is order through constant and shifting negotiation. A variety of communal decisions, on topics ranging from tax rates and public works to policing of vice and public behavior are ultimately decided by a political process of negotiation among organized interest groups. Often this is tacit negotiation that recognizes the latent power of a group (e.g., the willingness of police in San Francisco to ignore homosexual activity). And of course, this is not negotiation among equal parties. (For instance, the interests of the tourist industry in San Francisco carry unusual weight in deciding police enforcement activities.) Yet, for us, the important point is that order is maintained by a complex, often time-consuming, and precarious process of negotiation.

This process varies in detail from topic to topic. Indeed, many issues actually bring forth organized groups where none existed before, in response to a perceived collective threat (such as increased transit

fares or street widening). Manuel Castells' new study describes how organizations evolve around what he terms "contradictions" in the urban order, sometimes moving on to make fundamental changes in that order. The coalitions vary from issue to issue. For example, San Francisco neighborhood organizations sometimes ally with labor against business (e.g., on many taxing issues) and sometimes fight against the two combined (e.g., on many building issues). The latent threat of disorder, of the collapse of negotiation, is always part of the process itself, whether in the form of civil servant strikes, disruptive demonstrations, or the threat of ghetto violence that black leaders frequently remind officials about. This kind of solution to the problem of urban order chronically needs patching together; it is always on the verge of failing; and for these reasons, compounds the general sense of the populace that urban life is tenuous and morally chaotic. It is.

The "solutions" to urban disorder that I have described (not recommended) are by no means exclusive, exhaustive, nor even organized in the right categories. They are meant only to suggest some reasons why cities do not fall into a Hobbesian state, either at the level of personal interaction or at the level of community-wide dynamics, even when they seemingly should, when individuals reside in such large and anonymous and heterogeneous numbers that they should be warring. The "solutions" are also meant to suggest some lines of research.

Conclusion

The implication of my comments for future work in urban sociology is this: For those interested in the classic Chicago School issue, which I define as the connection between the structure of residential communities -- especially their degree of urbanization -- and the nature of "Community," that is, social integration and social order (Fischer, 1975), we must shift our attention. It is true, as Park and Wirth argued, that moral order in the metropolis is problematic. By comparison to small communities, moral consensus in the urban population is weak; conflict and chaos lie just below the surface and often break through. It seems not true, however, that the explanation for this disorder and tension are to be found in private life. Decades of research on the realms of private life, on family, friendships, ethnicity, neighborhood, and so on, have established that moral order does persist in private social worlds. While many interesting questions remain to be answered with regard to urbanism and intimate relations, we need to focus our attention more on the separate dynamics of the urban public order -- indeed on the kinds of topics my colleagues on this podium have addressed in their own work.

I have tried in this essay to suggest the kind of thinking that might be done, analyzing how urban public life itself generates threats of disorder and at least partial responses to that threat. This thinking may turn out to be largely wrong, but I submit that it is the kind of thinking that urban sociologists ought to do more of.

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